

Vocational teachers' personality, career calling and the aspects of teaching quality

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Abstract

Nowadays, the decline in the prestige of the vocational teacher profession is a great challenge and requires a thorough examination of teachers' personality and its relationship with teaching quality. The aim of the research is to analyse the relationship between vocational teachers' personality traits, career calling and the aspects of teaching quality. Three hundred and forty-six vocational teachers from Lithuania participated in the research. The results revealed that only slightly more than one-third of vocational teachers has chosen the teaching profession as calling. The high level of extraversion ($p < 0.01$), openness to experience ($p < 0.01$) and low level of neuroticism ($p < 0.01$) are related to professional calling of vocational teachers. Also, the various aspects of teaching quality are closely related to teachers' personality traits. Thus, the research findings might serve as the basis for providing a more comprehensive view of the psychological factors of the vocational teachers' profession.

Keywords: Vocational teacher, personality traits, career calling, teaching quality.

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1. Introduction

Personality influences the essential choice of individuals to enter the teaching profession. Individuals who purposely chose the career of a teacher usually relate the curriculum activity with the conception of personal values, attitudes and beliefs. Curriculum activity, its design, implementation and constant updating are essentially determined by the factors of teacher's personality. In terms of actual work of vocational teachers, personality determines the content of 'teacher–student' interaction, specifics of educational communication, emphatic relation between the teacher and student, value priorities, contexts of the quality of actual didactic process or chosen components of teaching quality.

In Lithuania, 79 vocational schools operating under the current Lithuanian vocational training system employs slightly more than 3,580 teachers. According to the data of 2015 of Statistics in Lithuania, 2,000 of the aforementioned teachers worked as vocational teachers in 12 education fields. Substantial changes can be observed over the past 15 years. The changes are related to reorganisation of the network of Lithuanian vocational schools, the change of priority directions of the curriculum as well as emergent qualifications framework of vocational teachers. Fifteen years ago, there were 123 vocational training institutions (82 vocational schools and 41 higher education institutions) in Lithuania, employing 8,334 vocational teachers (Lauzackas, Danilevicius & Gurskiene, 2004).

In many European countries, the importance of vocational education and training is emphasised because this leads to the economic growth of society (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012). However, nowadays the decline in the prestige of the vocational teacher profession is a great challenge and requires a thorough examination of teachers' personality and its relationships with teaching quality.

1.1. Vocational training and the quality of teaching

Professional competence of students majorly depends not only on the vocational teacher's didactic competences and knowledge of the taught subject (profession) curriculum, but also on the effective implementation of the educational interaction 'student–teacher–object of profession'. Vocational teachers usually identify the quality level of their performance and the purpose of their career based on the way that the didactic process implemented presupposes the principles and complies with the criteria of various teaching concepts. Scholars attempt to find the acceptable model of study, where learning quality usually begins with the identification of teaching quality context (Zydziumaite & Rutkiene, 2014). The concepts relate the teaching quality with the continuous improvement of the learner by acknowledging and motivating various methods of learning. The quality category also includes the perfection of things providing the strongest stimulus to believe that knowledge is the ultimate goal of a person's life. It is also oriented towards such standards of professional competences and qualifications which are raised to vocational training institutions not only by the employers, but also by the institutions formulating the state labour policy.

The contemporary teaching paradigms emphasise such components of the real educational interface which must be effective, useful, cost-effective and should meet the needs and expectations of the students and employees. Such high-quality educational interface components must ensure:

- educational interaction (Gao, Dai, Fan & Kang, 2010);
- newest innovative scholarly knowledge (Katterfeld & Konig, 2008);
- meaningful, reasoned, continuous and involved learning of students (Ehlers, Goertz, Hildebrandt & Pawlowski, 2005; Wu, Tenyson & Hsia, 2010);
- effective communication with students applying direct and virtual means of communication (Mitkus, 2012);
- the provision of professional knowledge on the level of student's experience and cognitive abilities (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010);

- the use of technology-based teaching means (Ignatova & Kurilovas, 2012; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010; Tereseviciene et al., 2015);
- the application of the methodologies of educational evaluation (Armstrong & Fucami, 2009);
- emphatic expression during the educational interaction (Bubnys & Zydziunaite, 2008; Martisauskiene & Vaicekauskiene, 2016).

The results of the vocational teaching quality can be reliably evaluated only during the real didactic process. According to Ehlers et al. (2005), quality is not a given constant feature of educational environment as it evolves from the interaction between the student and the environment. Therefore, it can be understood and evaluated only in actual context. By doing so, it is important to emphasise the necessity of the means which unequivocally indicates the value of constructive pedagogy and its place in the conception of learning and teaching activities. The latter sheds light on the importance of partnership in system 'vocational teacher–student–employee–vocational training politics and education administrators', which ensures the circumstances necessary for the vocational teacher to work effectively.

Almost all of the most significant forms of professional cognition are visible in such effective teaching circumstances: interactive thinking, employment of various human senses during the professional cognition, the employment of emotive cognition forms and stimulation of empirical cognition form (Tereseviciene et al., 2015). Didactic process encompasses such components of quality as interactive structured learning that motivates the students to learn continuously as well as to have involvement in the learning process based on association to effect (Laschinger, Wilk, Cho & Greco, 2009). In such teaching circumstances, the student is motivated to take responsibility for learning results. Furthermore, under such circumstances, the curriculum of vocational training is not depersonalised, which influences better internalisation of student's values and practical demonstration of critical thinking. The above-mentioned essential features of educational interaction show that the teaching quality model is closely related to the features of the personality of the teacher.

Many studies have acknowledged the importance of teacher personality (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Fatemi, Ganjali & Kafi, 2015; Gholami & Gholami, 2013; Hamilton, 2010; Iruloh & Ukaegbu, 2015; Pandey & Kavitha, 2015; Rusbadol, Mahmud & Arif, 2015). One of the more prominent models in contemporary psychology is the five-factor model of personality or the Big Five model (John, Naumann & Soto, 2008). This theory and its' measuring instrument is characterised by empiric validity, practical model value, the stability of individual differences and intercultural validity (Kairys, 2008).

1.2. Vocational teachers' personality

Personality influences the essential choices in the lives of people and the choice of career, which is one of the most important decisions (Alkheilil, 2016). The reasons why individuals choose to enter the teaching profession are related to personality (Quin & Watt, 2009). Personality traits are defined as 'dimensions of individual differences in tendencies to show consistent patterns of thoughts, feeling and actions' (McCrae & Costa, 2003, p. 25). This definition highlights that personality traits reflect general propensities in which 'an individual with a high level of a particular trait is more likely to engage in a particular activity' (Ham, Junankar & Wells, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, because of differences in personality, teachers respond differently to the same situations.

The Big Five model of personality covers five broad domains, which define human personality and account for individual differences (John et al., 2008; McCrae & Costa, 2003). The Big Five model of personality distinguishes between the personal traits of openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism.

People with a high degree of *conscientiousness* are prompt and reliable (McCrae & Costa, 2003). This personal trait of teachers is also related to the motivation of students' learning achievements

(Hart, Stasson, Mahoney & Story, 2007) as well as active self-regulation of activities (Hoyle, 2006). The *neuroticism* relates to one's emotional stability and degree of negative emotions. Usually the features of neuroticism are expressed in relation to ineffectiveness of career planning (Hartman & Betz, 2007), avoiding to actively make career-related decisions and get involved in the activities in their professional field (Wang et al., 2006). People who have a high degree of *openness* like to learn new things and enjoy new experiences (McCrae & Costa, 2003). This factor is related with self-actualisation by seeking creative and intellectual outcomes (Hartman & Betz, 2007), and also, with the level of career satisfaction (Lounsbury, Park, Sundstrom, Williamson & Pemberton, 2004). Teachers with low *agreeableness* may be more distant. People who have a high degree of agreeableness are oriented towards the development of interpersonal relationships by helping others to live a meaningful life (Hartman & Betz, 2007), which is determined by the mission of vocational training institution. *Extraversion* has a positive influence on person's career (Hartman & Betz, 2007). Extraverts are energetic, talkative and assertive and they get their energy from interacting with others (John et al., 2008).

The teacher is a key facilitator of knowledge and plays a vital role in the curriculum implementation. Iruloh and Ukaegbu (2015) found that agreeableness and extraversion personality traits have the relative contribution in the prediction of emotional intelligence of secondary school teachers. The research findings of Rusbadrol et al. (2015) study revealed that there is a positive association between openness to experience and agreeableness and job performance. On the contrary, there is a negative association between neuroticism and job performance. The results of Pandey's and Kavitha's (2015) research revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness to self-efficacy. However, there was a negative relationship between teachers' neuroticism and self-efficacy.

1.3. The aim and research questions

Nowadays, the decline in the prestige of the vocational teacher profession is a great challenge and requires a deep examination. The aim of the research is to analyse the relationship between vocational teachers' personality traits, career choice determinants and the aspects of teaching quality. In this context, two essential problematic issues are:

1. What are the factors that determine the career choice of vocational teachers?
2. What is the significance of vocational teacher's personality on the perception of teaching quality?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 346 respondents of the Lithuanian vocational training system, of whom 27.6% were men and 72.4% were female. The vast majority of the respondents were between 50 and 59 years old (38.2%). Most of them have a university education and a small part—higher non-university education (respectively 79.2% and 13%). More than two-thirds (71.7%) of the participants reported that they teach practical (professional) subjects, 18.8% are teachers of general subjects and 5.5% teach both. Most of the vocational teachers have a teaching qualification (63.9%) and senior teacher qualification category (47.4%). Among the participants, most are representatives of technology (48.6%) and social sciences (23.1%). The greater part of the participants is working in vocational schools (56.9%) and in vocational training centres (41.9%). The participants have a solid work experience—50.6% have more than 20 years. Most teachers (50%) are working full-time or more (27.5%).

2.2. Measurement instruments

The questionnaire involved socio-demographic characteristics of vocational teachers, career calling, evaluation of teaching quality aspects and the Big Five Inventory (BFI) to measure vocational teachers' personality traits.

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents include: age, gender, education, qualification of teachers and qualification category, field of taught subjects, school type and location, length of employment, occupied position and work experience.

Career calling was assessed by asking vocational teachers what determined their career choice. Participants were asked to choose one of the following answers: 1) career calling; 2) randomly chosen; 3) profession prestige; 4) important others (family/friends, etc.) or 5) to record their choice.

Components of teaching quality were assessed by asking respondents to evaluate the teaching quality factors provided in 5-point Likert scale (from 1—completely irrelevant to 5—very important). The question was—what determines the quality of the activities? The list of teaching quality factors has been developed by the authors based on scientific works on this topic.

The BFI (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998; John et al., 2008) was used to measure vocational teachers' personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. Translation of the questionnaire in Lithuanian was made and approved by the scholars of Vytautas Magnus University (Department of Psychology). The questionnaire is comprised of 44 short phrases that respondents had to evaluate using 5-point Likert scale (from 1—strongly disagree to 5—strongly agree). Indicators of internal consistency of questionnaire scales and short descriptions are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The description and reliability indicators of the Big Five dimensions

| Big Five dimensions | Short description | Cronbach alpha |
|------------------------|---|----------------|
| Extraversion | Includes inclination to sociability, activeness, talkativeness and optimism; | 0.692 |
| Conscientiousness | Includes planning, organising, setting tasks, self-discipline and the need for achievements; | 0.704 |
| Agreeableness | Related to altruism, attempts to help others, ability to understand and sympathise with others; | 0.617 |
| Neuroticism | A tendency to experience unpleasant emotions: fear, sadness, anger, discontent, guilt, etc.; | 0.686 |
| Openness to experience | Vivid imagination, attention to inner experiences, aesthetic sensitivity, desire for intellectual knowledge, interest in inner and outer world. | 0.816 |

The reliability (Cronbach alpha) of the Big Five questionnaire varies from 0.69 to 0.82. Thus, the reliability is sufficient, and the instrument is suitable for analysis.

2.3. Procedure

As a part of a larger anonymous survey, participants were asked to provide information on their socio-demographic characteristics, and to complete the BFI and to answer questions about career calling and teaching quality. Using the probability cluster selection method, 27 vocational schools (which comprise the one-third of all 90 currently operating state and non-state vocational schools) were randomly selected for the research from 10 regions of the country. All participants were provided with written information about the nature and purpose of the National research. The research data were processed using SPSS. Chi square test and Pearson correlation were employed to carry out the interrelations between variables. The selected reliability level is $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

3.1. Research findings concerning the first question

The findings indicate that in Lithuania only every third vocational teacher (35.8%) has chosen the profession of a teacher as career calling. During the research, even 43.5% of respondents indicated that random factors determined their choice of a career as a vocational teacher. Every eighth vocational teacher continues the family tradition (12.1%) and only 4.4% think that vocational teacher's career is a prestigious one.

The analysis of vocational teachers' personality traits indicated that the most expressed personality traits are agreeableness ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.50$) and conscientiousness ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.56$). Extraversion ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.52$) and openness to experience ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.45$) personality traits are also strongly expressed (because scores are above the mean value of the scale). Least expressed personality trait of vocational teachers is the trait of neuroticism ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.61$).

After performing the analysis of vocational teachers' career choice dependence on the Big Five personality traits, statistically significant differences are observed in cases of expressing personality traits of extraversion ($p < 0.01$), neuroticism ($p < 0.01$) and openness to experience ($p < 0.01$). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Career choice dependence on the Big Five personality traits

| Factors that influenced the choice of teacher's career | Extraversion, N (%) | | |
|--|------------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Low level | High level | Total |
| Career calling | 47 (27.2) | 73 (45.3) | 120 (35.9) |
| Randomly chosen | 85 (49.1) | 60 (37.3) | 145 (43.4) |
| Profession prestige | 11 (6.4) | 4 (2.5) | 15 (4.5) |
| Important others (family/friends, etc.) | 24 (13.9) | 17 (10.6) | 41 (12.3) |
| Other reasons | 6 (3.5) | 7 (4.3) | 13 (3.9) |
| Total: | 173 (100) | 161 (100) | 334 (100) |
| Note: $\chi^2 = 14.069$, $p < 0.01$ | | | |
| Factors that influenced the choice of teacher's career | Neuroticism N (%) | | |
| | Low level | High level | Total |
| Career calling | 71 (43.3) | 50 (28.7) | 121 (35.8) |
| Randomly chosen | 60 (36.6) | 87 (50.0) | 147 (43.5) |
| Profession prestige | 6 (3.7) | 9 (5.2) | 15 (4.4) |
| Important others (family/friends, etc.) | 16 (9.8) | 25 (14.4) | 41 (12.1) |
| Other reasons | 11 (6.7) | 3 (1.7) | 14 (4.1) |
| Total: | 164 (100) | 174 (100) | 338 (100) |
| Note: $\chi^2 = 15.469$, $p < 0.01$ | | | |
| Factors that influenced the choice of teacher's career | Openness to experience N (%) | | |
| | Low level | High level | Total |
| Career calling | 49 (27.2) | 71 (46.1) | 120 (35.9) |
| Randomly chosen | 90 (50.0) | 55 (35.7) | 145 (43.4) |
| Profession prestige | 7 (3.9) | 8 (5.2) | 15 (4.5) |
| Important others (family/friends, etc.) | 27 (15.0) | 14 (9.1) | 41 (12.3) |
| Other reasons | 7 (3.9) | 6 (3.9) | 13 (3.9) |
| Total: | 180 (100) | 154 (100) | 334 (100) |
| Note: $\chi^2 = 14.813$, $p < 0.01$ | | | |

In the case of extraversion, the analysis indicates that vocational teachers with low level of extraversion chose this profession randomly (27.2%) or encouraged by other people, usually by family or friends (13.9%). Meanwhile, most teachers with high levels of extraversion (45.3%) chose this profession as a career calling; and a highly expressed neuroticism is related with random choice of profession. For even 50% of respondents, the highly expressed neuroticism trait is related with the

randomness factor. Low level of neuroticism reflects that this profession was chosen as a career calling of vocational teachers (43.3%).

Statistically significant differences were also found regarding occupational choice and the trait of openness to experience ($p < 0.01$). Most vocational teachers, characterised as having a high level of openness to experience, chose this profession as a career calling (46.1%). Half of vocational teachers with low level of openness to experience (50%) chose this profession randomly.

3.2. Research findings concerning the second question

The components of teaching quality were analysed. The research revealed that vocational teachers devote most efforts to improving students' learning motivation ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.68$). The smallest amount of attention the respondents devote to the expression of empathy ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.97$). This fact is indicative of the situation when this type of career is chosen as calling (only every third vocational teacher chose this profession meaningfully). Also, vocational teacher pays little attention to teaching outcomes that would comply with the requirements of the job market ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.88$). This fact indicates that when planning the curriculum, a professional field is rarely researched and the changes occurring in terms of work tools, materials and technological processes are clearly defined. Additionally, vocational teachers do not pay a lot of attention to the factors of cost-effectiveness and rationality regarding the didactic process ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.82$). This means that when preparing the curriculum, the planning of the lesson structure is conditioned by the students' level of motivation, different experiences and by planning mistakes of didactic process made by educational managers. The correlation between the components of teaching quality applied by the vocational teachers and the Big Five personality traits is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation between the components of the teaching quality and the Big Five personality traits

| Components of teaching quality | Personality traits | | | | |
|--|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| | Extraversion | Agreeableness | Conscientiousness | Neuroticism | Openness to experience |
| 1. Expression of empathy | 0.077 | 0.156** | 0.064 | -0.100 | 0.220** |
| 2. Ability to rationally plan the education curriculum | 0.025 | 0.177** | 0.245** | -0.102 | 0.006 |
| 3. Ability to motivate the student to study | 0.205** | 0.159** | 0.271** | -0.104 | 0.202** |
| 4. Ability to understand the student | 0.052 | 0.260** | 0.171** | -0.054 | 0.170** |
| 5. Ability to relate the curriculum with the student's cognitive abilities | 0.086 | 0.118* | 0.168** | -0.124* | 0.107* |
| 6. Ability to use all the available cognitive forms | 0.040 | -0.024 | 0.083 | 0.001 | 0.092 |
| 7. Effective educational communication | 0.086 | 0.158** | 0.196** | -0.054 | 0.081 |
| 8. Teaching outcomes complying with market requirements | 0.089 | 0.078 | 0.031 | -0.012 | 0.007 |
| 9. Clear, logical and structured teaching of a subject | 0.023 | 0.091 | 0.105* | 0.017 | 0.014 |

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The results indicate that the expression of empathy is related with vocational teachers' traits of agreeableness ($p < 0.01$) and openness to experience ($p < 0.01$). Usually teachers possessing the aforementioned traits are quite altruistic, feel keenly and have a vivid imagination. They also devote a lot of attention to aesthetic sensitivity and try to see and evaluate themselves from the student's perspective. The research also indicates that teacher's abilities to rationally plan the education curriculum depends on his or her agreeableness ($p < 0.01$) and conscientiousness ($p < 0.01$). Stronger correlation ($r = 0.245$) with the conscientiousness trait indicates that rational planning of the education curriculum value those teachers that have inclination towards managerial competencies (they plan, organise, raise objectives for themselves and for their colleagues and implement them consistently and on their own).

Teacher's ability to motivate the student is related with such personality traits as extraversion ($p < 0.01$), agreeableness ($p < 0.01$), conscientiousness ($p < 0.01$) and openness to experience ($p < 0.01$). This means that teachers who are social, active, empathetic, interested in their students' and their own inner and outer world can direct their students to professional cognition that is meaningful and motivates them. This requires for a vocational teacher to have psychological competencies that enable him or her to better understand the personality types of the students, their experiences and motives of professional expression. This is demonstrated by the teacher's high level of agreeableness ($p < 0.01$), conscientiousness ($p < 0.01$) and openness to experience ($p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the level of neuroticism ($p < 0.01$) of these teachers is lower.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of this research indicate that components of teaching quality applied by vocational teachers are closely related to the teachers' personality traits. One of the best descriptions for these traits is provided by the Big Five theory (John et al., 2008; McCrae & Costa, 2003). Practical evidence shows that the personality traits of conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness and neuroticism determine the content of teacher–student interaction, the specifics of educational communication, empathetic teacher–student relationships, prioritised values, quality contexts of the real didactic process, circumstances of critical thinking and the chosen components of teaching quality.

For the most part, the inclination of personality determines the meaningfulness of vocational teacher's career. By choosing the career of vocational teacher, the person combines his circumstances of birth, socialisation or tradition continuation and tries to develop ones' life goals meaningfully and successfully. Regarding the motives of the teachers' career choice, the current situation in Lithuania indicates that only one of the three vocational teachers (35.8%) have chosen this profession as a career calling. Even 43.5% of vocational teachers working in this system chose this profession randomly.

The analysis indicates that statistically significant differences exist between the factors of vocational teachers' career choice and the teachers' personality traits. It was found that vocational teachers with high levels of extraversion and openness to experience but low levels of neuroticism chose the profession as a career calling. Whereas, while vocational teachers with low levels of extraversion and openness to experience but high levels of neuroticism chose the profession of vocational teacher randomly. The results are consistent with other research findings that extraversion personality trait has the relative contribution in the teaching profession (Iruloh & Ukaegbu, 2015) and has a positive influence on person's career (Hartman & Betz, 2007). Openness to experience also is related to the level of career satisfaction (Lounsbury et al., 2004) and self-actualisation by seeking creative and intellectual outcomes (Hartman & Betz, 2007). Interface of neuroticism and the random career choices can be explained by the fact that neuroticism is related to avoidance to actively make career-related decisions and get involved in the activities in their professional field (Wang et al., 2006).

The results revealed that the components of teaching quality applied by the vocational teachers are related to Big Five personality traits. By far, the largest amount of attention to teaching quality components is devoted by those teachers, whose personalities are characteristic of highly expressed agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience. These results are consistent with other studies, which have found that agreeableness has the significant contribution in the teaching (Iruloh & Ukaegbu, 2015; Rusbadrol et al., 2015), that openness to experience and conscientiousness has a positive effect in job performance (Pandey & Kavitha, 2015; Rusbadrol et al., 2015).

Research findings indicated these essential differences of becoming a vocational teacher and working later:

- The expression of personality traits—low extraversion, low openness to experience and high neuroticism—is the condition of random factors of choosing a profession and quite low prestige of the teacher's profession;
- Career calling is not typical for the vocational teachers, because they chose teaching as their second career (probably they choose their first career as calling, as becoming practitioners). Perhaps they enter the teaching profession because of lack of self-realisation in the previous profession and they committed to teaching only at the time they enter into teacher education;
- Vocational teachers whose personalities are characterised by agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience demonstrate the teaching quality and feel that their career is meaningful the most.

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